

Issues on a Food Consumption Survey in Korea

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ABSTRACT: The existing food consumption data in Korea do not fully meet the demand for users. It is recommended that a new food consumption survey be conducted on a national basis. The survey should contain detailed information about food, including prices of food and details on food away from home.

1. Introduction

Food consumption in Korea has undergone dramatic changes since the 1980s. These changes are mainly characterized by an increased demand for meat, fruits and vegetables, and food away from home. Under these situations, information on food is becoming important to consumers, producers, policy makers, and the food industry. Despite changes in food consumption patterns and increased demand for information on food, food consumption surveys conducted in Korea are not well adjusted to these changes in terms of objectivity and diversity of the data collected from those surveys.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss issues on the food consumption surveys conducted by the Korean government, focusing on survey designs and monitoring systems, and to suggest an alternative survey.

2. Description of Surveys related to Food Consumption in Korea

Three different surveys accounting for food consumption on a national basis are currently conducted. The National Nutrition Survey (NNS) conducted by the Ministry of Health and Welfare (MOHW) is the most popular food consumption survey in Korea. The NNS is designed to evaluate the nutritional content of the Korean diet and to improve the dietary status of Koreans. The NNS has been conducted every year since 1969. The survey will be conducted every three years from 1998.

The Food Grain Consumption Survey (FGCS) was launched in 1962 by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF). The purpose of the FGCS is to obtain basic information on food grain consumption in farm households as well as non-farm households. The FGCS data is collected throughout one year. The Family Income and Expenditure Survey (FIES) is conducted to collect information on urban households. Among the commodities classified, food is one of the major survey items. Food expenditures are aggregated into 14 food groups and collected over four hundred food items.

3. Issues on Food Consumption Surveys in Korea

Absence of a Nationwide Food Consumption Survey

The NNS and FGCS do not contain detailed information about food and consumer behavior. Therefore, these surveys' data do not fully meet the demand for policy makers, consumers, producers, and food processors.

Length of Survey Period

The NNS data pertain to a two-day time period, while the FGCS is conducted throughout one year. The two-day time period is not enough for monitoring the dietary status because infrequent eating is often a problem. It is not efficient to collect information only about grain consumption through a one year time period.

Absence of Detailed Information on Food Away from Home (FAFH)

NNS, FGCS and FIES data provide very limited information about FAFH. The detailed description of FAFH is not collected and reported.

Absence of Price and Quantity Information

In the FIES data, neither price or quantity information is separately available. In the NNS and FGIS data, food prices are collected but are not reported because of the data inaccuracy.

Lack of Cooperation between Government Organizations for Surveys

Although the NNS deals with food consumption behavior as well as with the dietary status of consumers, the NNS is independently conducted by the MOHW without cooperation with MAF.

4. Recommendations

Based on the issues mentioned above, the existing food consumption surveys should be redesigned so as to make data sets competitive. In these surveys, detailed information on FAFH should be included. For the NNS and FGCS, it is recommended that the price of food products be appropriately collected and reported.

It is recommended that the FGCS be extended to include all food items at the specific item level. The MAF plans to conduct a Nationwide Food Consumption Survey in 2000. It will provide policy makers, producers, consumers, and researchers with comprehensive information.